

# The old California mare is ill, call in Doc Otter

Marty Trillhaase

California Gov. Jerry Brown has a lot on his plate.

His budget is in crisis.

The housing crunch hit California hard.

Unemployment is in the double-digits.

Call in Doc Otter.

Speaking to the Idaho Credit Union League Government Affairs Conference at Boise earlier this month, Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter volunteered that a California lawmaker marveled at Idaho's balanced budget. What advice would Otter offer, this lawmaker asked.

"And I said, 'Listen, I was born in a family of nine kids in Caldwell, Idaho, and I have lived on farms and ranches and raised horses all my life,' " Otter said. "And I would tell you without any equivocation whatsoever, that if California were my horse, I would shoot it. ... I would put it down. Obviously easier said than done.' "

It's not the first time an Idaho governor has been indifferent to suffering in other states. Former Gov. Jim Risch bemoaned Hurricane Katrina's victims for sitting "around on the curbs waiting for the federal government to come and do something."

Otter also taunted his neighbors with a "love letter" to Oregon and Washington businesses, urging them to leave their higher-taxed homes for the haven of Idaho.

But is Sacramento in such sad shape that it needs to be put out of its misery?

Not if you ask Brown's office.

Which we did.

Here's what it said:

In Brown's first year in office, California's job growth rate was eight times greater than it was in Idaho during Otter's fifth year as governor.

"California gained 233,000 jobs between November 2010 and November 2011 (Idaho gained only 1,200 during this period), and California exports hit an all-time high of \$159 billion last year," responded press secretary Gil Duran in an email. "Surely Gov. Otter was just horsing around and not trying to engage in a serious critique because the facts just don't agree with him."

That's what happens when one governor uses another state as his old mare. You start drawing attention to your own shortcomings.

Such as:

- Food stamps - Nearly 14.5 percent of Idaho's people are drawing food stamps. At one point, Idaho had the fastest growth in food stamp caseloads in the U.S. Only 9.7 percent of California's population qualifies for that help.
- Economy - Sure, Idaho's still anemic 8.3 percent unemployment rate looks better, compared to California's 11.1 percent rate. But if you have a job in Idaho, you earn less. Idaho's per capita income is ranked 45th. California is ranked 10th.
- Public schools - Idaho spends less per student than every state but one. That's 50th out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. By comparison, California's ranking at 34th looks positively robust.
- Higher education - In California, 29.9 percent of the work force has at least a four-year degree. Only 14 states do better. In Idaho, it's 23.9 percent. Only 10 states do worse.
- Health care - Both states do a lousy job of insuring people for health care. In California, 19 percent are uninsured, compared to 17 percent in Idaho. But Otter's opposition to the national health care reform act would leave it that way.
- Mental health - Idaho now has the fourth highest suicide rate in the nation. California is ranked 42nd. Suicide occurs more often in a rural Western state, but Otter and lawmakers disregarded warnings that cutting Medicaid and mental health services would lead to more suicides.

If Doc Otter would pull the trigger on poor old California, what has he got in mind for us? - M.T.